

Spring 5-2012

The Impact of Teacher Demographics on the Overrepresentation of African American Males in Special Education in a Coastal School District

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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE IMPACT OF TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS ON THE
OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
MALES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN A COASTAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

Myrick Lamon Nicks

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2012

ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS ON THE
OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
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by Myrick Lamon Nicks

May 2012

African American students make up 17% of the public school population nationwide. Ironically, 41% percent of students in special education are African American (Kunjufu, 2005). The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of teacher demographics on the overrepresentation of African American males in special education in a coastal school district. Furthermore, this study examined the perception of teachers at different grade levels to see if there was a difference between elementary and secondary teachers' perceptions. According to the literature, African American males are overrepresented in special education placement throughout the United States' public school systems. Therefore this study was designed to investigate factors that may influence teachers' decisions to recommend students for special education services. The target population for this study was all regular education teachers in one coastal school district. The instrument used in this study was a 34-item survey that was developed to study the perception of educators about the overrepresentation of African American male students in special education. The data concluded there was an overrepresentation of African American males in special education, with African American males having a 32% population in the special education, yet only being represented at 26% in the general population. In addition to this finding in the data, it was also discovered that White males

were overrepresented in the district as well. White males made up 20% of the general population, but yield a 29% population in special education. The results of the study also indicated there was a correlation between some teacher demographics and overrepresentation of Black males in special education. Specifically, the ethnic group Asian and Pacific Islanders showed a significant impact on the perception of African American males in special education. Moreover, the results indicated there was a significant difference between grade level perceptions about African American males in special education, with the elementary having a higher perception percentage. Lastly the research implies that secondary teachers are more likely to agree with the factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of Black males in special education than the elementary teachers.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. David Lee, Dr. J. T. Johnson, Dr. Ronald Styron, and Dr. Rose McNeese. This accomplishment would not have been possible without your guidance, support, and leadership. In addition, I would also like to thank Dr. Doran Gresham for allowing me to use his survey in conducting my research. Next, I would like thank my beautiful wife Shantrell. You have been and always will be my greatest inspiration. To my children, Taylor, Mason and Jackson, I want you to set goals in your life, but most importantly I want you to reach them. I say thank you to my father and mother, Larry and Helen Nicks. You two have provided me with everything I have ever needed and wanted. I thank you for believing in me and instilling in me a desire to work hard. Most importantly, I want to thank God for giving me the ability and insight to reach such a monumental accomplishment in my life.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The overrepresentation of minority students, especially African American males, is a serious problem in today's special education system. Presumably, one would think that all things should be proportionate with the general population, the number of babies born each year, the number of students going to college after graduation, or the number of people getting married in the month of June. However, in the field of education, specifically special education, presumptions of population are not always what they appear to be. African American students make up 17% of the public school population nationwide. Ironically, 41% of students in special education are African American (Kunjufu, 2005). There is a range of opinions as to why this phenomenon has historically impacted education to include unfair housing after World War II through poor communities providing sub-par education to minority students. Regardless of the reasons, the fact remains that the lives of African American males are being jeopardized because of schools' failure to properly understand and implement special education procedures and the professional development necessary for teachers who teach at-risk students (Kunjufu, 2005).

The need to address the area of overrepresentation in special education is important because placement of students in special education who do not warrant being there can cause irreparable damage. African American males, as they matriculate toward graduation, are often stereotyped and labeled unfairly by teachers and thus many of them do not finish school and often create discipline issues throughout their academic career. According to Artiles and Harry (2005), special education placement is linked to a number

of negative issues. These issues include the kind of outcomes typically associated with disability labels, namely, low achievement level, high dropout rate, and limited access to the general education curriculum. Therefore, students who have not been properly evaluated and are placed in special education services consequently have the same label placed on them as students with true disabilities and often these students cannot avoid the mislabeling later in life. In addition, teachers are the responsible party for this life-changing decision that is made for a child and will most likely follow him for the rest of his life. People in positions of power who serve as gatekeepers, such as teachers and pupil services personnel, must be cognizant of their dominant knowledge and how power and authority can emanate from it, especially with people who have historically been oppressed (Artiles & Trent, 1994).

According to McIntyre and Parnell, there may be many considerations for referring a student to special education and race itself places a significant stigma on non-white students, in particular, Black males (McIntyre & Parnell, 1985). Nationally, it is estimated that nearly 20,000 African American male students are inappropriately classified as mentally retarded (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). Ineffective teachers who feel unable to teach at-risk students could inadvertently use special education placement as a tool for their personal bias. According to research, this problematic situation is very difficult to document (Artiles & Harry, 2005). With these startling statistics in mind, the research will first identify how many African American males are in special education in one coastal school district's student population as compared to other ethnic groups and their special education numbers. Secondly, a survey of teachers within this particular district will be conducted to determine to what extent teacher

demographics play on the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. Lastly, the completed survey questionnaire data will be analyzed by researcher to determine if there is a difference in perception from the elementary level to the secondary level on the part of teachers. By providing this research, upper level leadership can examine the reasons one group may be more biased than the other. In addition, staff development can be provided to teachers who need greater awareness of multicultural differences and this training should be incorporated at their particular grade level (Artiles & Harry, 2005).

In 2006, Jackson and Moore indicated that throughout the educational pipeline African American males have lagged behind their Caucasian counterparts academically. In addition, McGuire (2005) states that when controlling for socioeconomic status, African American males continue to lag behind other student groups in academic progress. Kunjufu (2005) has gone on to say that African American students comprise 17% of public school students but constitute only 3% of gifted and talented students with African American males representing less than 1%. Placement of African American males in special education can be seen as the other alternative for educators when African American males do not perform academically as well as other students. Consequently, Holzman (2006) specifically states that African American males are more likely to be identified and classified for special education services.

Statement of the Problem

Overrepresentation refers to the identification of a particular group served in special education that is higher than their population in general. In some instances, African American students are being placed in special education because teachers who do

not understand where their students come from fail to teach learning strategies that are connected to the student's cultural upbringing (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). As a result, teachers may possibly overlook the students who actually need assistance due to the teacher's focus on issues such as race and culture. In addition, teachers who are not thoroughly skilled in assessing students with learning disabilities often misdiagnosis what may truly be cultural differences (Dunn, Cole, & Estrada 2009). Lee-Traver (2006) suggests that the lack of training and teacher perception results in the problems that appear to be inherent in the special education referral process.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

1. Is there overrepresentation of African American males in special education in a coastal school district?
2. Is there a correlation in teachers' perceptions about overrepresentation of African American males in special education related to: a) teacher's gender; b) teacher's ethnicity; c) teacher's degree level; d) teacher's certification level; and/or e) teacher's experience level?
3. Is there a difference between elementary and secondary teachers' perceptions of the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

Definitions

African American - U.S. residents and citizens who have African heritage and identity. This term is used interchangeably with Blacks and Black Americans and is used to describe a racial and cultural group. African Americans make up approximately 13.4% of the U.S. population (Banks & Banks, 2007).

At-Risk - Students who are: (a) unable to complete high school; (b) students who are unable to leave high school with an adequate level of basic skills; (c) students who have failed one or more grades; or (d) students who have been found eligible for special or compensatory education programs (Miller, 1991).

Behavioral Disturbances (BD) - A disorder characterized by displaying behaviors over an extended period of time that significantly deviate from socially accepted norms for an individual's age and situation (Sadock & Sadock, 2003).

Emotional Disturbances (ED) - A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a large degree adversely affects a child's performance:

(a) an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances exhibited in several situations, (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, or (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (Federal Register, 1977).

Individual Education Plan (IEP) - A document developed at a meeting to determine the subsequent standard for which services will be carried out for the child in question (Kunjufu, 2005).

Overrepresentation - The high occurrence of minority, particular African American youth, inappropriately placed in disability categories like mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, and learning disabled (Hosp & Reschly, 2004).

Referral - A mechanism used by school personnel to request and obtain comprehensive and formal evaluation results to determine whether a student qualifies for special education evaluation (Turnball & Turnball, 1997).

Delimitations

The delimitation of this study was that researcher examined only the referral practices of teachers in one coastal school district. Teachers from the elementary, middle school, and high school levels were surveyed. As a result, data gathered from the study could only be generalized to the possible biases of teachers in that particular school district.

Assumptions

It was assumed that all participants read and carefully followed the instructions on the survey questionnaire. Furthermore, it was assumed that all participants completed and answered the survey honestly, understanding the purpose and rationale of the study.

Justification

The overrepresentation of African American males in special education is a critical issue surrounding African American men in today's society. Educators must find solutions to the problems that lead to these students being unfairly labeled and consequently set up for failure in their academic career and their post-graduation career. Teachers' misunderstandings of, and reactions to, students' culturally conditioned behaviors can lead to school and social failure (Neal, et al., 2003). Furthermore, the teachers charged to teach at-risk students need professional development in order to be better equipped in dealing with challenging students. According to Neal et al. (2003), teachers are highly likely to mistake cultural differences for cognitive or behavioral

disabilities. Furthermore, the knowledge base of these teachers is often incongruent with the educational realities and possibilities of this student population. Through this research of teacher bias as it relates to the referral process, staff development can be provided to support the teachers and students in all coastal school districts.

According to the literature, African American males are overrepresented in special education placement throughout the United States' public school system. Therefore this study was designed to investigate factors that may influence teachers' decisions to recommend students for special education services. In addition, teacher demographics will be explored and discussed regarding how they impact the placement of African American males in special education (Neal et al., 2003).

Summary

Chapter I consisted of an introduction into the purpose of this study. This included reasons for the research in the area of teacher demographics and their impact on the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. This chapter also introduced the research questions that would be pondered, along with definitions of terms that would be repeated throughout the study. In addition, delimitations and assumptions were presented for clarification and understanding as to how they would impact the study. Lastly, the justification of the research was added to help further understand why this aspect of research needed further investigation related to the overrepresentation of African American males in special education.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Times are exciting for both educational and literacy research. Students' learning abilities are being examined like never before as scholarly efforts are aimed at improving education and test scores. According to Moore (2008), it will take a broad, disciplined inquiry view of research, embracing use-inspired educational research at both local levels and national levels to establish productive links between adolescent literacy research, practice and academic success.

Overrepresentation

The issue of overrepresentation of African American males in special education has plagued the public school system since the integration of Black and White students during the Civil Rights movement (Shealey & Lue, 2006). Although there has been research regarding this unfair placement, there is little known evidence that supports how to fix the growing problem. Some researchers argue that it is a societal issue stemming from different socioeconomic levels and the plight of poverty and urban decay. Research that will examine the most obvious causes leading to the inaccurate selection of African American male students for special education classes is greatly needed (Shealey & Lue, 2006).

The many theories and historical information regarding these common practices must be explored through research. Because teachers are believed to be a great influence on young people, it can be expected that they will greatly impact students' academic success. Therefore, researchers should look at many teacher demographics, such as

teacher ethnicity, teacher age, teacher gender, teacher degree level, and/or teacher experience as they may relate to the selection process. Furthermore, it is important to examine the impacts of student age, gender and grade level as a means of understanding students' roles in special education placement. Other known literature must be reviewed in order to address the issue of instructional strategies and student achievement and how they may differ from the special education student to the regular education student. Lastly, the issues surrounding overrepresentation and its cultural implications should be assessed for the purpose of learning how this epidemic is impacting our society and what can possibly be done about it (Shealey & Lue, 2006).

Disproportionality Theories

When looking at the issue of overrepresentation or disproportionality of African American males in special education it is important to recognize and make use of the sociological and educational theories that may apply to this subject. The critical race theory contends that race and the issues of race cannot be ignored when dealing with the issues of human and social life (Moore, Henfield & Owen, 2008). Furthermore, researchers contend that in order to better address the concerns that may be affecting Black males in the academic setting it is important that their voices be heard. In other words, as educators, we cannot simply offer antidotes to a crisis that is affecting African American males but must include them in our efforts to rectify the circumstances that are impacting them.

In the book *Michael's Story* (Connor, 2006), a poignant poem was written by a former special education student. His understanding of today's students and their current situation offers volumes of information to be considered by all educators:

I worked hard to get out, but I never got out. Then I stopped caring. I didn't care. I'd act like the rest of them, sit and play around, making jokes, throwing stuff. I thought if they're keeping me here, I might as well do what I wanna do. The system...they really need to do it all over, coz things they do. Why they put kids in special ed? (p.156)

The writer of this heart-rending quote continues to explain the interactions of race, disability, and class and how the three ideas coexist to better understand the experiences of an African American male student growing up in urban America (Connor, 2006). In an extensive research article, sociological theories of learning disabilities were examined (Anyon, 2009). Anyon postulates four theories that deal specifically with the disproportionate involvement of minority youth in special education programs. The theories considered are Social Constructionism, Interactional theory, and Institutional theory. Within the Social Constructionism theory the idea of social action will be found. Social action deals with the idea that words play a very important role in the creation of identities and relationships. For example, within the realm of special education there are words that reflect notions of separatism and feelings of otherness (Anyon, 2009). This implies that students are separated from their peers and therefore have feelings of being left out and not able to achieve academic success.

The Interactional theory (Anyon, 2009) explores the role that it plays in identifying students for special education. In this theory, the authors suggest that learning disabilities are neurological disorders of the brains of students. However, in most cases students are not given neurological tests to determine their learning disability, but rather they are given assessment tests to prove their level of learning disability. This

attempt to prove a disability is inherently flawed and determination of a child's ability to perform is left up to teachers and administrators. Consequently, these determinations are subjective and are usually based on the behavior of the student and their inability to follow the expectations set by their teachers (Anyon, 2009).

Lastly, the Institutional theory deals with our institutions and their need to group behaviors as a means of controlling them. It is with this theory that educators use assessment tools, intervention models, and the referral process as means to cater to the particular interest of an organization. This theory implies that public schools often manipulate evidence in order to maintain or increase performance levels to receive funding. As a result, lower functioning students are often subject to placement in special education classes so as to not risk the greater good of the institution that services them (Anyon, 2009).

Historical Influences

The disproportionate placement of students of a particular group in special education programs means that the group is represented in such programs in a greater percentage than their actual percentage in the school population as a whole (Harry & Anderson, 1994). The root causes of disproportionality date back to the Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954). It was with this court decision that African Americans were declared entitled to the same education as their White counterparts. Consequently, this decision laid the groundwork for a different level of segregation of African Americans in America's education system. Students that were once separated due to their race were now being separated due to their disabilities. Prior

to Brown (1954), African American children with disabilities often went to school with their brothers, sisters, and neighbors without disabilities.

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, currently known as the Americans with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was created. This piece of legislation was the result of court cases such as *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. the District of Columbia* (1972), which established that separate schools for students with disabilities were unconstitutional (Blanchett, Brantlinger, & Shealey, 2005). Around the same time that schools were ordered to desegregate, it was becoming apparent that African American students were being labeled and placed in special education services at high percentages. In 1965 in San Francisco, California, an effort was led against the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954), which stated that districts were using special education as a tool for segregation. In 1974, *Johnson v. San Francisco Unified School District* brought forth this complaint to the courts. Shortly thereafter, plaintiffs in the well-known court case of *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) first filed suit. This case accused a San Francisco school district of discriminating against five African American students who had been placed in special education classes (Harry & Anderson, 1994). However, even with all the litigation and legislation that has brought forth attention to the crisis of overrepresentation, it is still unsettling that this problem has not been corrected. It is just as unsettling that procedures have not been put in place to identify the root causes (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

In 2004, with pressure to rectify disproportionality in special education at the state and local levels, the federal government increased interests with the additions of the

provisions in the reauthorization of IDEA (2004). These provisions outline the concerns with overrepresentation of minorities in special education, a problem that has been evolving from the onset of *Brown* (1954).

IDEA 2004 recognized the following:

1. Greater efforts are needed to prevent the intensification of problems connected with mislabeling and high dropout rates among minority children with disabilities.
2. There are more minority children being served in special education than would be expected from the percentage of minority students enrolled in the general school population.
3. African-American children are identified as having mental retardation and emotional disturbance at rates greater than their European American counterparts.
4. Studies have found that schools with predominately White students and teachers have placed disproportionately high numbers of their minority students into special education (IDEA, 2004).

Ironically disproportional selection is not clearly defined in IDEA (2004), nor was implementation of regulations mandated. In addition, discretion was given to the states to develop the quantifiable indicators of the disproportionality used for determining its level of significance (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibbs, Rausch, Cuadrado, & Choong-Geun, 2008). As time went on, new schools represented some change to the status quo of education.

The Education Act of 1975 called for nondiscriminatory assessment prior to special education and services by requiring (a) a comprehensive evaluation using and interpreting test with demonstrated reliability and validity, and (b) consideration of the contributions of the student's social and cultural background to the difficulties experienced in school. The Stanford-Binet and Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R) were the standardized tests that were used on all students. However, they continued to produce outcomes that showed African American children were five times more likely to be in EMR classes than their European American peers in more than a third of school districts nationwide (Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, & Robinson-Zanartu, 2005).

The results of this research called for academics to improve the cultural references of the test and to make them more culturally sensitive to the needs of the minority students who were being assessed. The opinion was that this would provide more accurate accounts of the level of intelligence African American students may possess. A standardized test score may be a relatively reliable predictor of a disadvantaged student's current capabilities, but it also accurately summarizes the tragic history of cultural and educational opportunity that led to those depressed capacities (Skiba, Knestling, & Bush, 2002a). Although the court cases and legislative acts seemed like a victory for parents of children in the wake of the Brown (1954) case, special education had become a new form of discrimination of minority students (Skiba et al., 2002a).

Teacher Ethnicity

The most important person in the decision process to refer a student to special education is the teacher (Kunjufu, 2005). The teacher is charged to instruct, facilitate,

observe, and assess students on a daily basis. It is when the teacher identifies a student or students as having learning disabilities that the teacher has to plan and implement interventions that are necessary to support the student. The teacher's ability to understand and relate to a student's cultural background can give him an advantage in increasing the student's academic achievement. Many factors play a role in teachers' capacities to understand their students. One very important factor is the connection that a teacher may share with his students.

The teacher's ethnicity plays a very important role in the relationship that he or she may have with his or her students. Kunjufu (2005) continues to explain that African American children seldom come in contact with teachers of their own race. In addition, African American students make up only 17% of the public school population, African American men account for only 1% of the teaching force. Currently, 80% to 90% of the U.S. teacher's population is White middle class, yet the diversity of the student population is ever-increasing and little has been done to correct the growing problem. Consequently, an African American male student can go from kindergarten to sixth grade without having the influence of a Black male teacher (Kunjufu, 2005).

This tragedy has not only impacted the students who have not had the opportunity to have the cultural perspective of an African American teacher, but it has also had detrimental impacts on students being referred to the special education system as a whole. In areas with the highest number of Caucasian teachers, the percentages of African American students identified as "special" are also higher (Kunjufu, 2005). Artiles, Harry, Reschly, and Chinn (2002), further explain that most districts comprised of Caucasian teachers have a greater number of minority students enrolled in special

education. A student's cultural background, which may differ from the teacher's, can sometimes be seen as deviant behavior and thus lead to recommendations for special education. In fact, teacher's prejudices and racial bias also influence referral decisions of minority students (Artiles & Trent, 1994).

Furthermore, the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education suggests that the cultural differences between European American female teachers and students from culturally different backgrounds results in interpersonal misunderstandings and frequent referrals to special education (Artiles et al., 2002). Certain characteristics are sometimes intimidating to European American female teachers. Kunjufu (2005) explains that the ideal school student often fits the White girl model. She is quiet in class, obedient, polite, focused and able to sit still for hours. In contrast, the African American male does not meet these expectations. He fidgets, has plenty of energy, is physically active and expressive, both facially and with his whole body. All of these characteristics normally conclude with the teacher labeling the student as behaviorally delinquent (Kunjufu, 2005).

In conjunction with the ethnic differences, (Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2002b) cultural images portray the African American male as disrespectful, violent, unintelligent, hyper-sexualized and threatening. As a result, these images are transferred into schools and classrooms to negatively influence the way in which young African American male students are treated. Black boys' behaviors are misunderstood by White middle-class teachers and subsequently, these students are seen as disobedient and unapproachable (Skiba, et al., 2002b).

Teacher Age

In a review of the literature dealing with teacher age, it was discovered that younger teachers reported more often than older teachers a feeling of job dissatisfaction and depression (Hewitt 1993). In a study conducted by Boe, Bobitt, Cook, Whitner, and Weber (1996), with a survey population of over 4,000 teachers in regards to age, the percentage of teachers who remained in their position was the lowest among teachers between the ages of 30-49. Teachers who left their jobs were the highest in age groups 25-30 and 55-65. Although little research has been conducted regarding teacher demographics and their impact on teacher referrals to special education, Ritter (1989) found a significant relationship between a teacher's demographics, gender and years experience, and the tolerance for disconcerting behavior. Furthermore, a teacher's characteristics may straightforwardly or in some way be related to the overrepresentation of African American males in special education (Boe et al., 1996).

Teacher Experience

Teacher experience is another aspect of the referral process for special education that cannot go untouched. A teacher's years of experience in the field of education can have monumental effects on the academic success of students. In the 1970s and 1980s, years of experience did not seem to impact job satisfaction, but secondary teachers seemed to have more fulfillment than most elementary teachers (McIntyre, 1983). Most individuals would assume that teachers with the most years of experience would offer students the most adequate education. However, a lot can be said regarding very ambitious new teachers trained in all the latest academic research. On the other hand, a teacher that has been through many different educational trends and accountability

requirements can often find himself burned out and not offering students the best quality education. These occurrences not only effect regular education students, but also drastically impact our most at risk students and those being misdiagnosed due to teacher burnout or lack of commitment (McIntyre, 1983).

Hargreaves (2002) said that teacher burnout can come about when teachers do not experience emotional connections to their students. In addition, Hargreaves mentioned that teachers have negative feelings when they lack connections with their students. In a study conducted in 1996 by researchers Boe, et al., general education and special education teachers were identified for the purpose of predicting factors related to attrition, transfer, and retention. Teaching experience was found to be significant in forecasting if teachers would leave teaching altogether. With teachers that had four years or more teaching experience, 5.6% left teaching completely and in contrast, for those that had less than four years teaching experience, 9.2% left teaching. In addition, elementary teachers moved to different schools at faster rates than secondary teachers. In 2001, Mertler found that middle school teachers had better job satisfaction than compared to high school and elementary school teachers. The same research revealed that male teachers were slightly more satisfied with their jobs than female teachers.

In conclusion, at risk students, who in this case are African American males who are being referred to special education, are not being properly educated by teachers that want to be in the field or by teachers that are on the verge of teacher burnout. This could result in a misdiagnosis of students for services that do not need to be referred. When teachers remain in the teaching profession regardless of their commitment to the students and have low expectations, the result is poor outcomes for students (Billingsley, 2004).

However, Billingsley concludes there is a positive correlation with increased job commitment and years teaching experience. As years of experience goes up, so does level of commitment.

Teacher Bias

When looking at the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, it is important to look at those who make the referral of the African American male student to special education and the cultural implications that may exist. Typically, White teachers have staffed public schools in the United States (Hyland, 2005). White teachers who are at the initial stages of the referral process can create an unintentional bias for their students of color depending on their cultural beliefs. Although few teachers would intentionally make efforts to endanger the educational opportunities of their students, some bias is inserted into schools simply because that is the culture when serving students of color. Some are even doing what they consider to be a wonderful gesture for the student (Hyland, 2005). A larger number of students of color with skills and backgrounds different from their teachers are being labeled as low performers and this label implies that students are in need of being fixed.

In addition, many African American students are unfairly expected to adhere to the mainstream protocols of educators and this expectation creates a negative relationship between student and teacher (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). According to Acker (2006), a classroom teacher's referral decision is the most significant factor leading to the eventual placement of students in special education. Moreover, the methods and the knowledge of the teacher used in recommending students to special education should also be looked at for clarity of effectiveness in the procedures. Another point of review should

be the professional background of the teacher in place to make such a profound decision on a student's educational career. A teacher who cannot teach effectively and use his influence to place students in special education due to their personal bias is a major factor and one that is difficult to document (Artiles & Harry, 2005).

According to Moore et al. (2008), throughout the educational pipeline, African American males have lagged behind their Caucasian counterparts academically, as well as their African American female counterparts. More specifically, African American males are the student group more likely to be identified and classified for special educational services. Nationally, it is estimated that nearly 20,000 African American male students are inappropriately classified as mentally retarded (Moore et al., 2008). The question must be asked, why do these alarming numbers exist? It would be unfair to assert that teachers are fully responsible for racial inequality in education or that they are solely responsible for correcting it. However, we do know that teachers can mitigate or exacerbate the racist effects of schooling for their students of color depending on their pedagogical orientation (Hyland, 2005). Hyland goes on to say those successful teachers of students of color identify the public school system as racist and see themselves as part of a larger political struggle for racial justice.

It is also understood that teachers are at the beginning stages of the referral process for African American males being referred to special educational services (Egyed & Short, 2006). The teacher referral is typically the initial step in diagnosis and placement for special educational services and, in an overwhelming number of cases, a teacher referral for special education services culminates in special education placement. Egyed and Short (2006) continue with several reasons why a student may be referred to

special education including self-concept, behavioral standards, ethnicity, level of teacher experience, and the ability of the teacher to deal with classroom problems. The research would indicate that teachers with more experience and higher levels of classroom control are less likely to refer students with behavioral problems to special education. Therefore, the students who would normally have behavior problems in an inexperienced teacher's classroom are less likely to be disruptive in a more experienced teacher's classroom. This reduction in disruptive behavior would allow for an environment to provide greater instruction and increase the overall achievement for the class and the disruptive students (Egyed & Short, 2006).

Teacher expectations have been defined as inferences that teachers make about the future behavior or academic achievement of their students, based on what they currently know about the students (Neal et al., 2003). Consequently, a teacher's misunderstanding of students' culturally conditioned behaviors can lead to school and social failure. Neal, et al. (2003) have indicated that teachers' perceptions and lack of cultural responsiveness can result in student psychological discomfort and low achievement. The authors also make the assertion that due to the long history of African American males being perceived as behaviorally deviant and intellectually inferior, it should come as no surprise those other non-African American males students perceived as "acting black" may also be at risk for low teacher expectations and school underachievement (Neal, et al., 2003).

In conjunction with the aforementioned belief, it is also creditable to believe that this cultural miscommunication could lead to teacher burnout. Teachers who feel overwhelmed and overstressed may be more apathetic toward their students. These

teachers may be more likely to desire removal of problem students because they have fewer personal resources and skills available to deal with classroom problems. In addition, teachers who are experiencing burnout may lack the mental fortitude to properly implement strategies for the pre-referral process or post-identification interventions used to redirect unwanted behavior (Egyed & Short, 2006).

Student Age

To ensure that African American males are meeting the adequate academic benchmarks, assessments, interventions, and instruction must begin as early as possible before these students begin falling behind. Wasik and Slavin (1993) explain that once a student has begun to fall behind, interventions are less effective. Although early intervention strategies are necessary for African American males, they are not always adequate. The early interventions usually weaken over time and have very little effect over cognitive outcomes. Kunjufu (2005) stated that boys are a few years behind girls in reaching benchmarks for reading, and it is suggested that if the age requirement were no longer required, and students were allowed to continue at their pace, African American referrals would be reduced.

Student Gender

Stereotypes based on gender and gender roles in society can take on many shapes, which do not exclude referral bias to special education programs (Andrews, Wisniewski & Mulick, 1997). Their research goes on to state that this type of bias can take on many forms, from the teacher acknowledging more girls than boys in the classroom for answering questions to even grading papers differently for boys than for girls due to neatness and creativity. Although it is easy to blame teachers for this oblivious bias,

many times they are simply carrying out the preconceived notions that society currently places on the differences in gender (Andrews et al., 1997).

A teacher referring boys more often than girls is not a new occurrence. A study carried out in the 1970s in which teachers were given the identical descriptions of students found teachers to have been more likely to refer the male student to special education than the female student (Gregory, 1977). Another study conducted by Acker (2006) concluded that Black males are referred to special education more than any other male from any other ethnic group. Gottlieb, Gottlieb, and Trongone (1991) give further insight into this phenomenon by adding that parents and teachers refer male students to special education at similar and higher rates. Parents refer 67% and teachers refer 69%. The research reveals that boys have a greater difficulty adhering to the behavioral constraints than girls, independent of disability. Therefore boys lack the ability to conform to school expectations and this adds to the larger number of boys in special education (Wehmeyer, 2001).

Learning Styles

Significant research has been done in the area of educating African American boys in decades past and the ultimate finding of researchers is that schools are not outfitted to meet the social and developmental needs of these students. Furthermore, Kunjufu (2005) articulates that many aspects of the curriculum and classrooms do not serve African American boys in both the special education setting and the regular educational setting. This situation can only be changed once schools become equipped with culturally sensitive techniques for student assessment. Peterz (1999) suggested that biased testing coupled with a teacher's misunderstanding of cultural differences can

create a union of misunderstanding which leads to an African American student being viewed as having a learning disability.

Carledge and Lo (2006) discuss school interventions that could reduce overrepresentation of Black males in special education as the following: high quality and culturally responsive curricula, effective prereferral services, effective academic and behavioral interventions, sound multidisciplinary assessment and planning procedures, and culturally sensitive family and community involvement (Carledge & Lo, 2006). Interventions would not only decrease discipline problems, they would create academic and social support for Black students in the least restrictive environments, as required by No Child Left Behind (Skiba et al., 2002a).

McCarthy (as cited in Kunjufu, 2005) discussed a four-part learning model in which classrooms could be arranged to better fit the diversity of students therein. The four types of learners are innovative, analytical, common sense, and dynamic. The traditional curriculum for the left-brain learner is seen as ruled-based, standardized thinking, and using memorization as mode of learning. On the other hand, the right brain curriculum would be freethinking, full of variety and creativity (Kunjufu, 2005). Using this type of research would help teachers of diverse populations adapt to the students they are attempting to help succeed.

Instructional Strategies

In 1975, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act came on the scene and gave money to states that were being mandated to follow laws being handed down by the courts (Yell, 2006). A major component of this law was the individualized educational plan (IEP) that each student with a disability was to receive. This plan included goals,

objectives, provisions, and evaluation procedures for the student. Furthermore, the educational plans of students with disabilities now had parental input and services and placement of the child were discussed with the parent's contribution. The effort to place students in the least restrictive environment for educational purposes was put in place to move students towards a general education and remove them from special education as soon as it was deemed appropriate (Vallecora, deBettencourt, & Zigmond, 2000).

As the special education movement continued, mainstreaming was put in place to remove students who were part of a regular classroom and provide them with special education services in a resource room (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2004). Miller, Leinhardt, and Zigmond (1988) discovered in their research that students in special education services, under the premise of mainstreaming, received less rigorous content compared with their regular education counterparts. Another researcher found special education classes to have lower expectations and move at a slower pace (Partanen, 1990). These issues with special education gave rise to the Regular Education Initiative (REI) in the 1980s. The REI was based on the idea that students with disabilities can be better served in a regular classroom setting and that all students with disabilities be placed back in the regular education classroom (Lilly, 1988).

With all the questions surrounding misrepresentation and overrepresentation of students in special education, it makes sense that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) in 2004. This new and improved act now required school districts to assess at-risk students and implement interventions to alleviate the learning deficiency that a student may have. Districts were now responsible for proving that a

student did indeed have a learning disability and that it could not be fixed with additional academic support. Furthermore, the response to intervention (RTI) component holds the teacher accountable for their classroom instruction and specific strategies they use for supporting students with disabilities (Friend & Pope, 2005).

Referral Process

Since the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act (IDEIA) of 2004, school districts have been charged with the responsibility to examine their methods for placing students into special education services. The purpose of this examination process is to better identify students that truly need these services, rather than those students placed in without proper scrutiny. The Act required states to provide for the collection and examination of data to determine if significant disproportionality is occurring within the state and local educational agencies, with respect to the identification of children as children with disabilities...and the placement in particular educational settings of such children (IDEIA, 2004).

The reoccurring themes that deal with minority students being placed in special education at high rates have to do with cultural variables that affect the initial reference of minority students, the biased assessment procedures and the effectiveness of instruction and intervention in addressing the academic and behavioral needs of at-risk students (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). The process for placing students in special education has traditionally been at the behest of the classroom teacher. This is because classroom teachers are in charge of curriculum and in most cases, are the primary adult responsible for assessing the understanding of the students they teach. However, some teachers have a more rigorous teaching method and demand a much higher academic

performance of their students, pushing them to raise the bar at all cost. The flip side to this approach is a teacher with a more patient and student directed approach that is geared towards the whole child and not just academic performance. Their individual perspectives may result in a variety of reasons that encourage or deter referral of a student (Dunn et al., 2009). Some educators believe that teachers are making recommendations because they are not adequately equipped to deal with students from different backgrounds and having them placed in special education relieves them of having to deal with their problem children (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

With the ever-changing diversity in school communities, teachers are now being faced with the challenge of teaching students that come from different cultural, ethnic and class backgrounds. African American boys are more likely to be identified with severe emotional disturbance and mental retardation in affluent, large White communities, but not in communities where 30% of the population represented African American families (Dunn et al., 2009). Furthermore, national trends indicate that nearly 61% of students identified as mentally retarded (MR) and nearly 50% of those identified as severely emotionally disturbed (SED) were African American (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). With these types of implications, it was necessary that initiatives such as teacher support teams be put in place to aid in the process for accurately placing students in special education.

These state and federally mandated teams are sometimes referred to as student study teams, multidisciplinary teams, or building based support teams (Lee-Tarver, 2006). No matter the names given to the teams, their purpose is to identify students who may have a disability that is causally related to the student's lack of progress in the regular education curriculum. Although these teams take on many forms in their efforts

to increase the academic performance for at risk students, they are often seen as a means to an end for placing students in special education services. In addition, teachers' lack of training in the intervention models that the support teams produce can lead to a flawed implementation of the interventions themselves (Lee-Tarver, 2006).

Referral Reasons

The first step to a student being placed in special education services is the referral. This step is seen as the single most important forecaster in a student being placed in special education classes (Artiles & Trent, 1994). Within the United States there are 447,426 or 8.6% of children classified as emotional behavior disturbed and receiving services under the Individual with Disabilities Act (U. S. Census Bureau, 2005). Ysseldyke, Vanderwood, & Shriner (1997) found that of 90% to 92% of students who were referred, 70% to 74% tested were determined to be eligible for special education services. With a teacher being the most important connection between information and student learning, it goes without saying that teachers hold the most influence in the referral process.

Teachers referred students for special education services because they performed at an academically lower pace (Knotek, 2003). For students who performed at lower rates, special education was seen as a legitimate placement for students who struggled academically. It was quite evident in the research that the placement of low performing students in special education was the norm (Shealey & Lue, 2006). Alarming, research has proven that African American students, especially Black males, are placed in special education classes at disproportionate numbers (Shinn, Tindal, & Spira, 1987).

In addition, Hosp and Reschly (2004) argue that academics are the most important issue forecasting overrepresentation of minority students in special education.

Preconceived notions about African American students and their academic performance have influenced teacher's decisions to refer students (Wehmeyer, 2001). For example, it was found that a teacher's personal images of race and gender dictates his pedagogical thoughts and influences his behaviors (Moore, 2002). It was also suggested a decade and a half ago that teacher personality may be more significant than some student characteristics in the process of referring a student for special education services (Meijer & Foster, 1988). Bahr and Fuch (1991) reported that the regular education teachers' main reason for referrals was based on actual or perceived low academic performance and Black students required a need for special services when compared to White students due to poor performance on standardized assessments. However, some researchers would argue that minority students have different styles of learning and are sometimes seen as being deficient and therefore referred for special education services (Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003). Problems such as low academic performance, behavior issues and student personality traits can be the reason for a student becoming eligible for special education placement. The factors can all contribute to the overrepresentation of minority students in special education (Artiles & Trent, 1994). Therefore investigating influences of teachers' bias as a decision for referrals to special education has been found worthwhile to explore (Moore, 2002).

Although the reason a student is being referred to special education should ultimately be based on the student having a cognitive inability to learn, other factors also exist to include:

1. The use of biased standardized tests that often do not give accurate measures of their abilities and potential.
2. The misinterpretation of their culturally based behaviors as indicators of the existence of a disability.
3. The inequitable funding of schools, which limit their access to educational resources (e.g., appropriate class sizes, high quality prereferral and ancillary services, current instructional materials and technology, licensed professionals) designed to meet their unique needs and promote student learning.
4. The perspective of professionals that minimize the involvement of family and community members and view families as disinterested in their children's school performance.
5. The failure of schools to collect data to identify, track and examine the extent to which disproportionality exist.

The aforementioned reasons (Moore, 2002) may very well give false representations of students' abilities to maintain a sufficient level of academic performance. However, they should not serve as justification for placing an African American male student in special education services. Other reasons African American students may be referred for special education include the lack of instructional time spent in the classroom, disrespect, insubordination, and fighting. These are often reasons African American male students are suspended from school (Salend & Duhaney, 2005). The suspensions associated with the misbehavior could be linked to valuable classroom time and teacher instruction missed. This often results in the teacher being unable to

bring the student to his or her needed level of academic performance and seeing special education services as a means to support this student with low academic performance (Salend & Duhaney, 2005). In addition, a student being referred displaying shy or withdrawn behavior could be associated with the difference between a student's home life and the expectations upon arriving at school. For example, parents of a child may instruct the child not to get in trouble at school or face dire consequences when he returns home. For some children this may be seen as a responsibility placed on them by the parent to not interact with students who may potentially lead to them getting in trouble. On the other hand, the teacher interprets their lack of involvement as withdrawn behavior and therefore labels the child as antisocial (Salend & Duhaney, 2005).

Overrepresentation Outcomes

It is true that the issues of disproportionality are not new news and that for decades recommendations have been researched and collected to help solve the problem that is hurting a certain portion of our nation's youth, African American males. In as much, two decades ago the National Research Council reported a strategy for equity in placing students in special education. Algozzine (2005) explains that the council's following "principles of responsibility" made good sense.

1. It is the responsibility of teachers in the regular classroom to engage in multiple educational interventions and to note the effects of such interventions on a child experiencing academic failure before referring the child for special education assessment.

2. It is the responsibility of the assessment specialist to demonstrate that the measures employed validly assesses the functional needs of the individual child for which there are potentially effective interventions.
3. It is the responsibility of the placement team that labels and places a child in a special program to demonstrate that any label used is a distinctive prescription for educational practices and that these practices are likely to lead to improved outcomes not achievable in the regular classroom.
4. It is the responsibility of the special education and evaluation staff to demonstrate systematically that high-quality, effective special instruction is being provided and that the goals of the special education program could not be achieved as effectively within the regular classroom.
5. It is the responsibility of the special education staff to demonstrate, on at least an annual basis that a child should remain in special education classes. A child should be retained in special education class only after it has been demonstrated that he or she cannot meet specified educational objectives and that all possible efforts have been made to achieve these objectives (Algozzine, 2005).

It is the responsibility of the administrators at the district, state and national levels to monitor on a regular basis the pattern of special education placements, the rates for particular groups of children or particular schools and districts, and the types of instructional services offered to affirm that appropriate procedures are being followed and to address any inequities found in the system.

Ironically enough, with such sound thought and consideration given to these responsibilities, it is disheartening that the same issues remain prevalent and the system of special education is still the same (Algozzine, 2005). However, today's classrooms are ever-changing and the children in the classrooms have a greater sense of diversity. Although this diversity can be a great source of learning opportunities for children, it can be a monumental task for the teachers who are put in the classrooms to manage and teach these students (Algozzine, 2005; Salend & Duhaney, 2005). Throughout all the data collection and the research, the consensus of the educational community is that academic achievement of African American males begins to increase when they are looked at as students who can have success despite their circumstances. Furthermore, it is the teacher who is in place to be instrumental in any child's success at school. Through no fault of the teacher, the misunderstanding of student culture (Salend & Duhaney, 2005) often lends itself to miscommunication in the classroom and thus leads to disciplinary actions taken upon the student. African American males often find themselves in the principal's office moving further and further away from the educational system that considers them bothersome and difficult to teach. Teachers, on the other hand, could find themselves feeling incompetent and unable to reach difficult students. However, teachers who experience burnout and teacher efficacy issues can find solace in cultural training and behavior management which can increase their confidence in teaching (Egyed & Short, 2006).

In addition, involving families in school activities and decision-making would create a positive climate that would promote student achievement and social performance (Salend & Duhaney, 2005). When other family members are comfortable with the school

environment, they become advocates for what the school personnel is communicating to their children in their absence. However, beyond cultural differences and behavior issues lies a much deeper problem impacting our Black males and that is poverty. If the many factors of poverty in the African American communities are not addressed, disproportionality could be affected, but not resolved (Kearns, Ford, & Linny, 2005).

Cultural Implications

According to Grossman (1995), males are more likely to be enrolled in special education programs for students with developmental disabilities, behavior disorders, emotional disturbances and learning disabilities. This is especially the case for poor African American and Hispanic young men. Furthermore, a large number of students referred to and placed in special education programs are often students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Grossman, 1995). In fact, a recent examination of the persistence of disproportionate representation has revealed that poverty may represent a greater contributor to the problem than other variables such as ineffective teaching, a flawed referral and placement process and misperceptions about students based on race and culture (Shealey & Lue, 2006).

According to O'Connor and Fernandez (2006), poor children are often the consequence of early harms or risk factors associated with their socioeconomic status. They often develop a higher incidence of impairments that are manifested as latent traits for disability. These traits, however, remain dormant when there is appropriate intervention. Interventions, then, diminish the impact of poverty-induced traits or prevent the traits from "being expressed as a learning disability" (p. 196).

In order to understand the African American male's status in the public school system, it is important to understand his status as perceived by others in society. This perception often lends itself to the stereotypes and labels that are placed on African American students in the education realm (O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006). In addition, (Jackson & Moore, 2006) it is imperative to see how these labels and stereotypes often perpetuate the cycle that is the cause of other detrimental circumstances. According to some researchers, you can read any popular or scholarly publication and it conveys African American males as a population at risk. Irrespective of their family's income status or level of education, for many African American males, a stigma of inferiority follows them. It seems to be heightened by social domains, such as education, where intelligence is continually assessed (Jackson & Moore, 2006).

This stigma is also an aspect of the educational system that impacts the performance of African American males in school. The high-school dropout rate of Black males is high, with 20 to 30 percent of urban Black youth leaving school prior to graduation. Additionally, it is estimated that less than 44% of all Black men are functionally literate (Jenkins, 2006). These statistics not only impact the school environment and how African American males are being reached in the classroom, but these numbers carry forward into other areas of society.

According to Jenkins, African American men are 14 times more likely to die of murder than European American men. The rate of homicide among Black men ages 15 to 24 is the highest for any group within the U. S. population and the suicide rate has surpassed that of their White counterparts. Whereas Blacks make up approximately 15% of the total U.S. youth population, they also represent about 25% of all juvenile arrests

and approximately 40% of juvenile detention populations. In addition, Black boys make up 80% of all delinquency cases handled by the juvenile courts in the United States (Gavassi, Russell & Khurana, 2009). Therefore to be young, Black and a male sets the stage for some tremendous hurdles to be maneuvered as you navigate our educational system.

Although there has been substantial research regarding socioeconomic status and it's links to academic success, it is necessary to look at how this may impact an African American male student's success in the public school arena. One of the predominant explanations of special education is that disproportionality is the interaction of race and poverty (Skiba, Poloni-Straudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005). The authors offer these assumptions:

1. Minority students are disproportionately poor and hence are more likely to be exposed to a variety of sociodemographic stressors associated with poverty.
2. Factors associated with living in poverty leave children less developmentally ready for schooling and ultimately yield negative academic and behavioral outcomes.
3. Students who are low achieving or at risk for negative behavioral outcomes are more likely to be referred to, and ultimately found eligible for special education services.
4. Therefore, poverty is an important contributing factor that increases the risk, presumably in a linear fashion, of special education placement for minority students. (p. 131)

The link between poverty and disproportionality is not as concrete as one would like to think. Recent research (Skiba et al., 2005) indicates that race and poverty are considered simultaneously. However, knowledge of race appears to be a more important predictor of special education identification than knowledge of poverty status (Skiba et al., 2005).

Ironically, charter schools have higher numbers of White students receiving educational services. Fierros and Blomberg (2004) indicated two issues that may account for the high percentage. First, minority students and students with more severe disabilities are counseled out and persuaded to avoid enrollment in a charter school. Secondly, administrators and instructors at charter schools are less trained in the area of special education and encourage families to seek out services at a public institution.

Summary

In summary, Fierros and Blomberg (2004), point toward many issues surrounding overrepresentation of African American males in special education. Issues such as teacher bias and teacher ethnicity must be fully examined to determine what role they play in teachers' perception of Black males. Furthermore, the implications of placing African American males in special education are extremely detrimental to the overall plight of Black males in society. These issues must be addressed at the root of the problem, such as in the field of education, in order to provide better direction to our Black youth. Lastly, teacher and student demographics must be investigated to determine the roles they play in placement of African American males in special education. Otherwise, their academic futures can be predicted.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the process and procedures used in conducting this research to explore the overrepresentation of African American youth placement in special education classes in a large coastal school district. Overrepresentation is the high occurrence of minority, particularly African American males, inappropriately placed in disability categories like mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed and learning disabled (Hosp & Reschly, 2004).

Another variable discussed in the study was the possible correlation in teachers' perception about overrepresentation of African American males' placement in special education classes and teachers' gender, ethnicity, degree level, certification level, and/or years of experience.

The study also used demographic information about coastal teachers within the study to make a determination about whether there is a difference in elementary school teachers' and secondary school teachers' perception of overrepresentation of African American males in special education classes. The demographic information used was teacher's gender, a teacher's ethnicity, a teacher's degree level, a teacher's certification level, and/or a teacher's experience level.

The three research questions addressed in this study were:

1. Is there overrepresentation of African American males in special education classes in a coastal school district?

2. Is there a correlation in teachers' perceptions about overrepresentation of African American males in special education related to: a) teachers' gender; b) teachers' ethnicity; c) teacher's degree level; d) teacher's certification level; and/or e) a teacher's experience level?
3. Is there a difference between elementary and secondary teachers' perceptions about the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

Additionally, there were three null hypotheses for this study. Hypothesis one: There is no overrepresentation of African American males in a coastal school district. In this hypothesis archival data from the 2010 school year was used to validate whether there was a statistical overrepresentation of African American males in a coastal school district, $t(16) = -3.560, p < .001$. Hypothesis number two: There is no correlation in a teacher's perception about overrepresentation of African American males in special education related to teacher's gender, a teacher's ethnicity, a teacher's degree level, a teacher's certification level and/or teacher's experience level. A statistical analysis, $(F(12,269) = 9.230, <.001, R^2=.292)$, was used to look at the teacher responses to the survey and the responses to demographic information provided in section three of the Gresham Survey. Hypothesis number three: There is not a difference between elementary and secondary teacher's perception about the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. A Pair t-test, $(t(280) = -4.446, p < .001)$, was used to analyze the teachers' responses to the survey and each teacher's response to section two, question number five, which asked one question regarding the individual grade level taught by each teacher.

Research Design

The purpose of this research questionnaire design was to examine the overrepresentation of African American males in a coastal school district and the perceptions of teacher bias towards African American males in special education related to teacher demographics. Furthermore, this study examined the perception of teachers at different grade levels and see if there was a difference between elementary and secondary teachers' perceptions. This was accomplished by analyzing the responses of teachers to the Gresham Survey. The Gresham survey is a questionnaire instrument designed by Dr. Doran Gresham of George Washington University. Dr. Gresham, the creator of the Gresham Survey has granted permission for his survey to be modified and used for the purpose of this research (Appendix A).

The survey used in the study was a 34-item survey that was developed to study the perception of educators about the overrepresentation of African American male students in special education. In examining the Gresham survey, there was a direct connection between the survey and the research questions presented in this study. For example, in section one of the Gresham survey, questions 12 through 23 dealt with the ethnic differences between teachers and students and the bias that may exist according to the teachers' responses. In addition, the second research question asked for the demographic data of teachers and the correlation it may have on the perceptions of African American students in special education.

Moreover, section three of the Gresham Survey requested specific data from teachers regarding their demographic information (i.e. age, years experience, gender, and ethnicity). Section three also asked information concerning the grade levels taught by

both elementary and secondary teachers. This information was examined to see what, if any, difference was found between teacher perception on the elementary level and teachers on the secondary level. Other questions throughout the survey asked teachers about their overall perception regarding African American males in special education. A five-point Likert scale was used for participants to indicate their responses: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Undecided; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly Agree. The survey was administered to and data was gathered from all regular education teachers at 18 schools in a coastal school district that include elementary, middle and high school teachers. Surveying teachers on both the secondary and elementary level was done for the purpose of examining the change in teacher perception within the two different teaching levels.

Participants

The target population for this study was all regular education teachers in one coastal school district. There were no special education teachers or teacher assistants surveyed for the purpose of this study. Specifically, the researcher wanted to examine the perceptions of all teachers who have the ability to refer a child to special education in the school district. The coastal school district was made up of 449 regular education classroom teachers. These teachers represented a total school district population of 6,915 students with 919 receiving special education services. This population was broken down demographically as 48% African American, 39% Caucasian, and 13% other (which include Latino, Asian, and Native American). No students were surveyed for the purpose of this research.

Instrumentation

Dr. Doran Gresham of George Washington University developed the survey instrument for this research (Appendix B). Permission to use the survey was granted by Dr. Gresham (Appendix A). The original survey was designed to evaluate the perceptions teacher regarding the overrepresentation of Black males of elementary age with Emotional Disturbances. However permission was granted to make wording modifications allowing the survey to include elementary-aged students as well as secondary students. In addition, the modification was allowed to include all students referred to special education, not just those labeled as Emotional Disturbances. According to the original author, the school that was used for the pilot test was not a part of the larger sample, but was used to indicate the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach alpha used to describe the reliability coefficient was .9392. Therefore, all of the questions were geared toward one overall concept (Gresham, 2005). In addition, my analysis of the data yielded a similar Cronbach Alpha of .940.

According to the author of the Gresham Survey, a panel of experts validated the content of the survey. The panel was consisted of two general educators, one administrator from the host school system that participated in the pilot study, five professors of education from George Washington University and two professors of special education that have authored several articles on the issue on disproportionate ethnic representation in special education. Each of the content experts were given a copy of the survey and asked to give feedback. There were a total of ten professionals who gave input into the creation of the instrument.

Expert Panel

Copies of the Gresham Survey were given to a panel of experts consisting of two special education teachers, one regular education elementary school teacher, one regular education secondary teacher, and one central office personnel. Their ethnicity, age, and gender extended from both African American to White, male and female, and a variety of different years of experience. The purpose of polling these different individuals was to get honest feedback about the way the survey made them feel personally. This was due to the fact they were being asked sensitive questions about their perception of African American males in special education. All of the participants in the expert panel took the surveys independently and gave both written and verbal feedback regarding the survey. The overwhelming response from the panel was the courage it took for the researcher to embark on such a sensitive topic. There was no response that indicated a feeling of uneasiness about answering the questions in the survey. All of the participants were enthusiastic about participating in this level of research and thought it was a necessary investigation. Overall, the expert panel saluted the need to challenge educators to think about how they looked at all of their students.

Data Collection Procedures

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix E), an explanation of the study and consent letter was sent to a coastal superintendent, requesting that the researcher be granted permission to review school data regarding special education in the school district (Appendix C). With the permission of the Superintendent, the researcher contacted the Director of Special Education to obtain the number of students currently enrolled in special education for the 2010 school year. Specifically, the researcher

requested the number of the Black males, White males, Black females, White females, males of all other remaining ethnic groups and females of all other remaining ethnic groups for their special education population.

Demographic data for the general population was requested from the Superintendent for the purposes of this research. In addition, permission was requested to contact principals (Appendix D) in the school district requesting the opportunity to provide teachers with the Gresham Survey (Appendix B). Once permission was obtained from the Superintendent, additional information concerning the study was forwarded to the principals in a coastal school district to include all elementary schools, sixth grade academies, middle schools, and high schools. All correspondence done within the district was done with consent of the Superintendent. Furthermore, all cost to print, copy, and distribute materials within the district was done at the expense of the researcher.

The participants in the survey were regular education teachers within the district. Once permission was granted from the school principals, the researcher distributed the surveys to 15 schools for which they would be disseminated by principals during staff development training. Because it was not possible for the researcher to be at all 15 locations, each survey was attached with an explanation of the study and information regarding anonymity and participation (Appendix B). The principal was allowed to distribute and gather the surveys at their discretion. The time frame of one week was put in place for the researcher to pick up the surveys from the schools. Upon collection of all questionnaires from all schools, the researcher removed any incomplete surveys and analyzed all data collected.

Limitations

Some limitations anticipated by the researcher were teachers not wanting to participate in the study due to the researcher's relationship to the district, as well as the concern of not being able to remain anonymous. Furthermore, some teachers may have experienced apprehension that the results of the study may be a direct reflection of their bias towards African American male students in the district. However, it was the researcher's intent to explain the study and to protect the anonymity of the participants. In addition, all participants were allowed to discontinue the survey at anytime with no reprisal.

Data Analysis

In order for the researcher to gather the particular data needed for his purpose, a quantitative study was designed and put into place. To answer the first research question, the researcher looked at the population of students in a coastal school district. The numbers of African American male students in special education were compared to the overall population of the African American males in the school district. Likewise, the researcher considered the number of White males, Black females and White females in the school district and compared their populations to the number of special education students representing their respective populations. Finally, all others (Hispanic, Asian, Native American, etc.) were categorized as one group, and divided between male and female. This final group, when divided between male and female were compared to its special education population as well. Pair t-test were used to analyze all data.

In addition to looking at descriptive data, the data from the Gresham survey was analyzed to determine if there was a correlation between teacher bias towards African

American males referred to special education and demographics that were specific to teachers. Once this information was gathered, the researcher looked at the number of students in special education on the elementary and the secondary school level. It was important to the researcher to consider the level at which all students were being identified in order to determine if bias of African American males was more prevalent at the elementary level or the secondary level. Data collected from the Gresham Survey was analyzed using SPSS, and the descriptive statistics were calculated to learn if there was a difference between teacher bias (dependent variable) on the elementary and secondary levels (independent variables).

The identities and information collected from participants in the research was protected and conducted on a voluntary basis. The findings of the study were given to the Superintendent of the school district for further investigation and the possible considerations for change or redesign in current staff development and operating procedures.

Summary

In summary, the data that was collected from the school district has been retrieved with full permission granted from the school superintendent and principals. In addition, any teacher that was asked to participate in the survey did on a volunteer basis. No students were interviewed or surveyed. However, anonymous student data on record in the school district was reviewed. The analysis of the Gresham survey was used to determine the perceptions of teachers towards Black males in special education. Furthermore, the data from the survey questionnaires were examined to determine whether bias occurs more often on the elementary level or the secondary level.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to see if teacher demographics impact the overrepresentation of African American males in special education in a coastal school district. In looking at the impact of teacher demographics on overrepresentation, an analysis was conducted on teachers' gender, ethnicity, degree level, certification level and experience level. It was also necessary for the researcher to investigate whether there was indeed overrepresentation of African American males in the district where the data was collected. Furthermore, the data was analyzed to determine if there was a difference between the perceptions of teachers on African American males in special education in elementary schools versus teacher perception in secondary schools.

A 34 item survey, with 10 additional demographic-type questions, entitled The Gresham Survey (Appendix E) was given to 449 regular education school teachers in a coastal school district. Out of the 449 surveys that were administered to teachers, 285 were returned generating a return rate of 63%.

Descriptive Data

The characteristics of the teachers who participated in this study are presented in tabular and narrative form in this section of the chapter. The results indicated that the participants were most likely to be female (62.8%) and most likely to be White (81.8%), followed by Black (13.7%). The gender and ethnicity of the research sample is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Gender and Ethnicity

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Males	105	36.8
Females	179	62.8
Missing	1	.4
Total	285	100
Ethnicity		
American Indian	2	.7
Asian	2	.7
Black	39	13.7
Hispanic	4	1.4
White	233	81.8
Missing	5	1.8
Total	285	100

Table 2 summarizes the school levels of teachers that are represented in the study. The results indicate that the teachers were relatively split evenly across the school levels with 54% from the elementary level and 45% coming from the secondary level.

Table 2

<i>Grade Level</i>		
Grade Level	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
K-6	154	54.0
7-12	128	44.9
Missing	3	1.1
Total	285	100

The participants' summarized responses in Table 3 indicated that 50.9 % of teachers in the school district had a Masters degree, 47.0% have a Bachelors degree with 2.1% have obtained a Doctoral degree.

Table 3

<i>Degree Level</i>		
Degree Level	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Bachelors	132	46.3
Masters	143	50.2
Doctoral	6	2.1

Table 3 (continued).

Degree Level	<i>f</i>	%
Missing	4	1.4
Total	285	100

Table 4 indicates the number of teachers that participated in the study that currently have a valid teaching license in the state. The responses were overwhelmingly found in the yes category with 95%, and a small percentage, 1.4% indicated they did not have a valid teaching license.

Table 4

Valid Teaching Certification

Valid Teaching Certification	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	278	96
No	4	1.4
Missing	3	1.1
Total	285	100

The teachers taking part in the study were also asked to indicate the number of years of experience they had in teaching. A large percentage of teachers (60.7%) had seven or more years experience, 21.4% of teacher had four to six years experience, 10.9%

of teachers had one to three years of experience, and 6.7% had less than a year experience. This information was expressed in Table 5.

Table 5

Years of Experience

Years of Experience	<i>f</i>	%
Less than 1 year	19	6.7
4-6	31	10.9
7 or more	173	60.7
Missing	1	.4
Total	285	100

Table 6 interprets the number of years a teacher has taught at his particular school. The largest population of teachers in the school district have seven years or more experience (29.5%) in the same school. However, the second highest population of teachers has taught at their school between four to six years (28.1%).

Table 6

Number of years taught at the school

Years	<i>f</i>	%
Less than a year	62	21.8
1-3	58	20.4
4-6	80	28.1
7 or more years	84	29.5
Missing	1	.4
Total	285	100

In Table 7, teachers participating in the survey were asked if they had they received any multicultural and/or cultural sensitivity training. Out of the 285 teachers, 244 (85.6%) reported they had received some multicultural training, versus the 38 (13.3%) teachers in the district who reported not having any type of multicultural training.

Table 7

Multicultural training

Training	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	244	85.6

Table 7 (continued).

Training	<i>f</i>	%
No	38	13.3
Missing	3	1.1
Total	282	98.9

Table 8 expresses what type of multicultural and/or cultural sensitivity training teachers in the district had received. There was an overwhelming number of 126 teachers (44.2%), which received their training within the district. On the other end of the spectrum were 42 teachers (14.7%) who had gained their training in another school district.

Table 8

Provider of multicultural training

Provider	<i>f</i>	%
Current administration	126	44.2
Teacher educational program	57	20.0
Different school system	42	14.7

Table 8 (continued).

Provider	<i>f</i>	%
Other	20	7.0
Missing	40	14.0
Total	285	100

Out of the 285 teachers surveyed regarding the overrepresentation of African American males in special education in a coastal school district, 196 (68.8%) indicated they had received training on how to refer students to special education. Contrary to these numbers, 83 teachers (29.1%) stated that they had not been given any training on how to refer students to special education. Table 9 interprets this information.

Table 9

Referrals to special education training

Training	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	196	68.8
No	83	29.1
Missing	6	2.1
Total	285	100

In Table 10, teachers were asked if they had received training on how to refer student for special education support within the district. There were 198 teachers (69.5%) who answered yes to being given training on how to refer student for educational support. However, there were 83 teachers (29.1%) who answered no, because they had not received the training.

Table 10

Referrals for support training

Training	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	198	69.5
No	83	29.1
Missing	4	1.4
Total	285	100

Teachers in Table 11 were asked if they had received training within the district on the characteristics of students who may need special education services. Of those surveyed, 184 teachers (64.6%) indicated they had received this type of training whereas 99 teachers (34.7%) stated that they had not been given this type of training.

Table 11

Training on detection of special education characteristics

Training	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	184	64.6
No	99	34.7
Missing	2	.7
Total	285	100

Out of 285 teachers that were surveyed concerning the overrepresentation of African American males in their district, 109 teachers (38.2%) had referred an African American male or males for special education services. There were 173 teachers (60.7%) that had not referred an African American male to special education. This information is represented in Table 12.

Table 12

Referral of black males to special education

Referral	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	109	38.2
No	173	60.7
Missing	3	1.1
Total	285	100

In Table 13 there were 73 (25.6%) teachers reporting their referring to special education had resulted in placement of an African American male to special education. Contrary to that, 166 teachers (58.2%) indicated their referrals did not result in placement of an African American male to special education.

Table 13

Referrals resulting in placement

Referral	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	73	25.6
No	166	58.2
Missing	46	16.1
Total	285	100

Data Analysis

This section of the chapter presents the data analysis findings for each research question and hypothesis. Therefore, each research question and hypothesis was evaluated and a decision was made to either retain or reject the null hypothesis based on the significance of the value.

Research Question 1

Is there overrepresentation of African American males in special education in a coastal school district? The null hypothesis states that there is not an overrepresentation of African American males in special education in a coastal school district. According to Table 14, African American males make up 26% of the overall school district population.

However, 32% of the African American male population in the school district receives special education services. The test was significant, $t(16) = -3.560, p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. In addition, the White male population within the district also displayed an overrepresentation with a 29% special education population versus a 20% over population, $t(15) = -4.303, p < .001$, which was also significant. There was no other ethnicity that displayed any significant difference. Specifically, elementary teachers had a high perception towards African American males is special education than secondary teachers.

Table 14

Overrepresentation

Ethnicity	Mean	n	Std. Deviation
Black males	.26	17	.08
Sped Black males	.32	17	.11
White males	.20	16	.02
Sped White males	.29	16	.13
Hispanic males	.06	16	.04
Sped Hispanic males	.06	16	.01
Black females	.22	17	.05
Sped Black females	.15	17	.06

Table 14 (continued).

Ethnicity	Mean	n	Std. Deviation
White females	.19	17	.07
Sped White females	.16	17	.08
Hispanic females	.06	12	.09
Sped Hispanic females	.04	12	.02

Research Question 2

The second research question was asked whether there was a correlation in a teacher's perception about overrepresentation of African American males in special education related to: a) a teacher's gender; b) a teacher's ethnicity; c) a teacher's degree level; d) a teacher's certification level; and/or e) a teacher's experience level. The null hypothesis states that there is not a correlation in teacher's perception about overrepresentation of African American males in special education related to: a) a teacher's gender; b) teacher's ethnicity; c) a teacher's degree level; d) a teacher's certification level; and/or e) a teacher's experience level. There is a significant correlation between teachers' perceptions about overrepresentation of African American males in special education related to certain demographics, ($F(12,269) = 9.230, <.001, R^2=.292$). According to Table 15, the ethnicity, Asian or Pacific Islander provided feedback and was significantly and positively correlated with perception of teachers toward African American males in special education ($\beta=.145, p<.05$). Moreover, the variable GRADE level was a significant and positive correlation with the perception of

teachers towards African American males in special education ($\beta=.266$, $p<.05$). Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 15

Regression coefficients

Variable	B	Beta	Sig.
Constant	2.361		.000
American Indian or Alaskan Native	.208	.020	.738
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.094	.145	.028
Black, not of Hispanic Origin	.520	.280	.083
Hispanic	-.071	-.013	.860
White, not of Hispanic origin	-.298	-.178	.307
Less than one year experience	.219	.087	.109
1-3 years experience	.009	.004	.935
4-6 years experience	-.071	-.046	.401
Bachelor's degree	.023	.018	.945
Master's degree	.004	.003	.990
Doctoral degree	.053	.012	.896
Grade level	.339	.266	.000

Research Question 3

The third research question was analyzed using an independent samples t-test to check for a difference between elementary school teachers and secondary school teachers and their perception about African American males in special education. Using a five point Likert scale where 1 indicates *strongly disagree* and 5 indicates *strongly agree*, elementary teachers rated the importance of teachers' perception toward African American males in special education ($m = 2.55$, $sd = .66$) similarly to secondary school teachers ($m = 2.88$, $sd = .56$). There was a significant difference ($t(280) = -4.446$, $p < .001$) between elementary teachers and secondary teachers and their perceptions of African American males in special education.

Table 16

Independent Samples t-tests Comparing Elementary and Secondary Teachers

Grade	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
K-6	154	2.55	.66
7-12	128	2.88	.56

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings from the study. Quantitative data collected from a coastal school district was presented in the form of narrative descriptions and statistical tables. Data was organized according to descriptive statistics reported to investigate the perceptions of teachers towards African American

males in special education. Chapter V presents the implications, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter V is separated into four different sections. The first section of Chapter V is the Summary section which is the recap of what the study entailed. Next is the Finding and Conclusions. In this section of the study, the finding are discussed and organized according to the research question. The Limitation section, discusses the conditions that may have limited the results of the study. Following the Limitations section is the Recommendations for Policy and Practice and Future Research. In this section, the researchers contends with how this research can be used for further study, as well as, any new questions that may have arose out of the investigation of the research.

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine teacher demographics and their impact on the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. Overrepresentation refers to the identification of a particular group served in special education that is higher than their population in general. In some instances, African American students are being placed in special education because teachers, who do not understand where their students come from, fail to teach learning strategies that are connected to students' cultural upbringing (Neal, et al., 2003). Therefore, the researcher investigated the research questions to see if there was an overrepresentation of African American males in a coastal school district and to see if there was a correlation in a teacher's perception about overrepresentation of African American males in special education based upon teacher demographics. The demographic information that was

investigated was related to a teacher's gender, a teacher's ethnicity, a teacher's degree level, a teacher's certification level, and/or a teacher's experience level. In addition, data was reviewed to see if there is a difference between elementary and secondary teachers' perception about the overrepresentation of African American males in special education.

This was accomplished by analyzing the responses of teachers to the Gresham Survey. The Gresham survey is a survey that was designed by Dr. Doran Gresham of George Washington University. The survey is a 34-item survey that was developed to study the perception of educators about the overrepresentation of African American male students in special education. Moreover, a section of the Gresham Survey asked specific data from teachers regarding their demographic information (i.e. age, years experience, gender, and ethnicity). This section also asked information about the grade levels that each teacher taught, to determine if this impacted their perception about African American males in special education (Gresham, 2005). The survey was administered to all regular education teachers at 15 schools in a coastal school district to include elementary, middle and high school. There was a direct connection between the survey and the research questions presented in this study.

Findings and Conclusions

The demographic information provided descriptive information regarding teachers and their perception of African American males in special education. The majority of the teachers that participated in the survey were female teachers (63%), while the leading ethnic group for teachers was White teachers (82%). Therefore it was obvious in the data collected that the majority of the teachers in this coastal school district were predominantly White female teachers. However, African American male

students make up 26% of the entire school district's population and African American teachers make up only 13.7% of the district's total teaching population, including male and female. According to the current research, the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education suggests that the cultural differences between European American female teachers and students from culturally different backgrounds results in interpersonal misunderstandings and frequent referrals to special education (Artiles et al., 2002). Furthermore, the descriptive data also indicated that 173 teachers in the school district had over seven years or more of teaching experience. In conjunction, 85% of teachers within the coastal school district indicated they had received some type of multicultural or diversity training in their career, with 44% of them receiving their training from the current administration. African American students are being placed in special education because teachers who do not understand where their students come from fail to teach learning strategies that are connected to students' cultural upbringing (Neal, et al., 2003).

Although this coastal school district had a large percentage of teachers that received some type of training in the area of cultural diversity, it still appears there are a large amount of referrals of African American males to special education from this teacher population with 38% who had referred an African American males to special education. According to Algozzine (2005), it is the responsibility of teachers in the regular classroom to engage in multiple educational interventions and to note the effects of such interventions on a child experiencing academic failure before referring the child for special education assessment.

The descriptive information used in the study also yielded data regarding what teachers indicated as the most and least important contributors to overrepresentation in special education in the survey. In Question 25: Environment Factors (e.g. exposure to drugs and violence), teachers pointed out with the strongest agreement that this environmental factor was a major contributor to the overrepresentation in special education. In contrast, Question 21: Student hairstyles, was seen as the least of the environmental factors that contributed to the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. According to O'Connor and Fernandez (2006), poor children are often the consequence of early harms or risk factors associated with their socioeconomic status. They often develop a higher incidence of impairments that are manifested as latent traits for disability. These traits, however, remain dormant when there is appropriate intervention. Interventions, then, diminish the impact of poverty-induced traits or prevent the traits from "being expressed as a learning disability" (p. 196).

The research questions in this study were centered on the overrepresentation of African American males in special education in a coastal school district. The study used quantitative data to gather information to answer the research questions and to determine if the null hypotheses were rejected or accepted.

Research Question 1

Is there overrepresentation of African American males in special education in a coastal school district? The null hypothesis states that there is not an overrepresentation of African American males in special education in a coastal school district. The data concluded there was an overrepresentation of African American males in special

education; with African American males having a 32% population in the special education, yet only being represented at 26% in the general population. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected because there was overrepresentation in African American males in special education. In addition to this finding in the data, it was also discovered that White males were overrepresented in the district as well. White males made up 20% of the general population, but yield a 29% population in special education. According to Wehmeyer, boys lack the ability to conform to school expectations and this adds to the larger number of boys in special education (2001). A teacher referring boys more often than girls is not a new occurrence. A study carried out in the 1970s in which teachers were given the identical descriptions of students found teachers to have been more likely to refer the male student to special education than the female student (Gregory, 1977). This is an alarming discovery for both male populations due to the fact that only 27% of special education students graduate from high school (Kunjufu, 2005).

Research Question 2

The second research question was asked whether there was a correlation in teachers' perceptions about overrepresentation of African American males in special education related to: a) a teacher's gender; b) a teacher's ethnicity; c) a teacher's degree level; d) a teacher's certification level; and/or e) a teacher's experience level. The null hypothesis states that there is not a correlation in teachers' perceptions about overrepresentation of African American males in special education related to: a) a teacher's gender; b) teacher's ethnicity; c) a teacher's degree level; d) a teacher's certification level; and/or e) a teacher's experience level.

The results of the study indicated there was a correlation between some teacher demographics and overrepresentation of Black males in special education. Specifically, the ethnic group Asian and Pacific Islanders showed a significant impact on the perception of African American males in special education. However, of the 285 teachers reporting in this study only two teachers were from this ethnic background. Therefore this was not a large enough sample size reporting to give credence to this discovery. Also, the teachers on the elementary level represented 54% the teachers reporting in this study and on the secondary level 45% of teachers reported. Therefore it was a higher response from the elementary grade levels regarding their perception of African American males in special education than on the secondary level. This data would imply that elementary school teachers have a greater need to notice characteristics of their students and a greater responsibility to detect students with disabilities. However, Wasik and Slavin (1993) explain that once a student has begun to fall behind, interventions are less effective. The early interventions usually weaken over time and have very little effect over cognitive outcomes. Kunjufu (2005) stated that boys are a few years behind girls in reaching benchmarks for reading and it is suggested that if the age requirement were no longer required, and students were allowed to continue at their pace, African American referrals would be reduced. The researcher concludes there was a significant correlation of teacher grade level and their perception of African American in special education primarily due to the perception of elementary teachers. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Research Question 3

Is there a difference between elementary and secondary teacher's perception about the overrepresentation of African American males in special education? The null hypothesis says there is not a difference between elementary and secondary teacher's perception about the overrepresentation of African American males in special education.

According to the results there is a significant difference in the perception about overrepresentation of African American males in special education as it relates to grade level. In section one of the Gresham survey, questions 12 through 23 dealt with the ethnic differences between teachers and students and the bias that may exist according to the teachers' responses. These ethnic differences consisted of cultural beliefs, certain biases, student's style of dress, student's style of hairstyle, walking style, and speech patterns (Gresham, 2005). Using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 indicates *strongly disagree* and 5 indicates *strongly agree*, the data concluded that secondary teachers averaged a 2.88 mean scale score versus the elementary teachers mean scale score of a 2.55. Therefore there is a difference and the null hypothesis is rejected.

In conclusion, there is overrepresentation of African American males in special education in a coastal school district. However, the results of the study also indicated there was also overrepresentation of White male students in the special education population within the same coastal school district. Furthermore, the results of the study indicated there were correlations between teacher demographics and the perception of African American males in special education, but it was only relative to two of the demographics researched; Asian and Pacific Islanders and Grade level. It is important to note that teacher ethnicity and gender did not have a significant correlation although

ethnicity and gender are major components of this study. Finally, the results indicated there was a significant difference between grade level perceptions about African American males in special education, with the elementary having second highest perception percentage. It is also important to relay that the number of elementary teachers reporting were higher than the secondary teachers reporting. More importantly, the secondary teachers agree more with the factors that contribute to overrepresentation.

Limitations

In this section, the researcher discussed the limitations that may have impacted the overall research of the study. The overwhelming limitation in this study was the use of one school district to conduct the study. Using one school district's involvement in the study stifles the data that may have been gained from other teachers in other school districts. In addition, the 285 regular education teachers within the coastal school district are also colleagues of the researcher. Therefore, the high return rate of the surveys (63%) was partly due to the support the researcher was able to gain from fellow administrators as well as teachers who wanted to support a fellow district employee. However, this may have also have caused a concern for teachers answering the survey, knowing that the researcher serves in an administrative role in the district. It could have been a concern their answers would be looked upon as detrimental to our student body thus have a negative recourse to their position within the district. Although the researcher took every precaution to maintain anonymity, the concern may have yet and still impacted the survey choices of the voluntary participants.

In addition to the limitations that were found within the school district, there was also little research that had been conducted on the Mattie T decree. This decree began

with a court case that determined that overrepresentation was prevalent in the state of Mississippi. In fact, the research was limited to Power Points created by the Department of Education for the state of Mississippi. Further analysis of this decree would have proven supportive of the study conducted by the researcher and will be an area of suggestion for future research.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This section provides recommendations for the future research of policy and practice for any person interested in the impact of teacher demographics on the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. Because this study was conducted in one school district, it is recommended that both larger and smaller school district examine their teacher populations for perceptions about African American males in special education. In addition, using multiple school districts would provide for a wider range of teacher perceptions towards African American males in special education. Educators would also benefit from the insight from those students being placed in special education. Conducting interviews with African American male students who are being referred to special education could stand to provide some powerful feedback from those who are to be served. Furthermore, specific research on how to deal with behavioral issues of African American males, while increasing their individual student achievement would also prove beneficial for educators.

Furthermore, superintendents, principals, and teachers need to evaluate their practices regarding all male students being recommended for special education. The findings in this research indicate that both White and African American males are victims of overrepresentation. Educators should provide specific interventions for the male

populations in their school districts. In addition, the implementation of staff development that specifically addresses the need to support students from different cultural backgrounds would also be necessary in future practice. Lastly, educators need to practice how to better communicate to parents the need to help students make positive adjustments from home culture to school culture and provide training to parents in order to support students.

Recommendation for Future Research

There needs to be an evaluation of the Mattie T decree and the other policies created to ensure the proper implementation of the referral process in all school districts. This future research would give understanding of such litigation and whether it has proven successful in rectifying the wrongs of overrepresentation. As it stands, there is very little peer-reviewed information as to the impact of the Mattie T decree and its current status in the state. This particular piece of policy should be researched more as the issue of overrepresentation continues to be a problem in our education system.

APPENDIX A
REQUEST FOR USE OF SURVEY



Dear Dr. Gresham:

My name is Myrick Nicks and I am a doctoral student at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am currently working on my dissertation topic *The Impact of Teacher Demographics on the Overrepresentation of African American males in Special Education in a Coastal School District*. I would like to know if there is a significant correlation among the teacher demographics in my district and the perception of African American students referred to special education. Your survey, The Gresham Survey, is an ideal survey to solicit this information from teachers and I would like to know if you would grant me permission to use and/or modify your survey so that I can use it to conduct my study.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Myrick Nicks
USM Doctoral Student

By signing below you are granting me, Myrick Nicks, permission to use and/or modify your instrument so that I may use it to conduct my study. I will give you full credit as the originator of the instrument in my study.

I, Dr. Doran Gresham, give Myrick Nicks permission to use and/or modify The Gresham Survey.

Doran Gresham (Signed electronically on 2/20/11)



Best of luck to you.

Dr. Doran Gresham

APPENDIX B

THE GRESHAM SURVEY

This survey consists of three sections.

Section I seeks information from elementary and secondary school general educators about the overrepresentation of elementary and secondary aged Black males that are identified for Special Education services.

Section II seeks demographic information from the respondents to this study.

Section III asks you to make further comments about the overrepresentation of elementary and secondary aged Black males identified for Special Education services or to quantify your responses.

Because time is both precious and limited, this survey has been carefully designed so that you can complete it with ease. The estimated time for completing this survey is 15 minutes.

Your participation is completely voluntary and I want you to feel free to decline participation or to discontinue participation at any point. Any information inadvertently obtained during the course of this study will remain completely confidential. Following data analysis, questionnaires will be shredded.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that the research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions of concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS, 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

If you have any questions concerning this survey research project, please feel free to contact me at myrickn@gmail.com or [REDACTED]. Thank you for your time with this research.

Sincerely,

Myrick Nicks
Doctoral Candidate
The University of Southern Mississippi

THE GRESHAM SURVEY (Section I)

<p>The following statements relate to your perception of causal factors about the overrepresentation of elementary and secondary aged Black males identified as students in Special Education</p> <p>To what extent do you agree that the following factors contribute to the overrepresentation of elementary and secondary aged Black males identified as students in Special Education?</p> <p>Please place an X under the response that best reflects your views</p> <p>(Page 1)</p>	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. Language barriers between teachers and students					
2. Ineffective behavior management strategies on the part of the general educator referring this student for special education services					
3. Inappropriate teacher training					
4. Subjectivity in the district referral process					
5. The lack of clarity in school guidelines for special education services					
6. Culturally biased assessment instruments					
7. Lack of minorities' involvement in producing special education theory					
8. Lack of minorities' involvement in producing special education laws					
9. Lack of minorities involvement in producing special education regulations					
10. There are more Black males in the elementary general education school population					
11. The threat of student aggression					
12. The perception that Black males are low achievers.					

<p>The following statements relate to your perception of causal factors about the overrepresentation of elementary and secondary aged Black males identified as students in Special Education</p> <p>To what extent do you agree that the following factors contribute to the overrepresentation of elementary and secondary aged Black males identified as students in Special Education?</p> <p>Please place an X under the response that best reflects your views</p> <p>(Page 2)</p>	<p>Strongly Disagree (1)</p>	<p>Disagree (2)</p>	<p>Undecided (3)</p>	<p>Agree (4)</p>	<p>Strongly Agree (5)</p>
13. Teachers' negative preconceptions about the behavior of Black males					
14. Ethic differences between teachers and students					
15. Cultural beliefs and/or differences between teachers and students (e.g. heritage, religion, socio-economic status SES)					
16. Cultural beliefs and /or difference between students and their peers					
17. Certain biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the general educator					
18. Certain biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the student					
19. Certain biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the student's families					
20. Students' style of dress					
21. Students' hairstyles					
22. Students' walking styles					
23. Students' use of culturally different speech patterns or slang					
24. Hereditary factors (e.g. pre-natal exposure to drugs, biological transmission of mental illness etc.)					
25. Environmental factors (e.g. exposure to drugs and violence)					

<p>The following statements relate to your perception of causal factors about the overrepresentation of elementary and secondary aged Black males identified as students in Special Education</p> <p>To what extent do you agree that the following factors contribute to the overrepresentation of elementary and secondary aged Black males identified as students in Special Education?</p> <p>Please place an X under the response that best reflects your views</p> <p>(Page 3)</p>	<p>Strongly Disagree (1)</p>	<p>Disagree (2)</p>	<p>Undecided (3)</p>	<p>Agree (4)</p>	<p>Strongly Agree (5)</p>
26. Being raised by a single parent (mother)					
27. Being raised by a single parent (father)					
28. Being raised by two biological parents					
29. Being raised by adopted parents					
30. Being raised by foster parents					
31. Being raised by extended family (e.g. aunt, uncle, grandparent)					
32. Being raised by legally separated or divorced parents					
33. Being raised by economically wealthy parents or guardians					
34. Being raised by economically poor parents or guardians					

Additional Comments

Are there any other reasons that you believe to be critical about the overrepresentation of elementary and secondary aged Black males identified as students in Special Education?

THE GRESHAM SURVEY (Section II)

Please take a moment to answer the following questions about you!

1. What is your gender?
 - ☐ a. Male
 - ☐ b. Female
2. What is your ethnicity?
 - ☐ a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - ☐ b. Asian or Pacific Islander
 - ☐ c. Black, not of Hispanic origin
 - ☐ d. Hispanic
 - ☐ e. White, not of Hispanic origin
3. What is the highest degree you have earned?
 - ☐ a. Bachelor's Degree
 - ☐ b. Master's Degree or graduate degree
 - ☐ c. Doctoral or post –graduate degree
4. Do you currently have a teaching certificate in the state of Mississippi?
 - ☐ a. yes
 - ☐ b. no
5. Which grade level(s) do you teach?
 - ☐ a. Kindergarten
 - ☐ b. 1st grade
 - ☐ c. 2nd grade
 - ☐ d. 3rd grade
 - ☐ e. 4th grade
 - ☐ f. 5th grade
 - ☐ g. 6th grade
 - ☐ h. 7th grade
 - ☐ i. 8th grade
 - ☐ j. 9th grade
 - ☐ k. 10th grade
 - ☐ l. 11th grade
 - ☐ m. 12th grade
6. How many years have you been a general education teacher?
 - ☐ a. Less than one year
 - ☐ b. 1-3 years
 - ☐ c. 4-6 years
 - ☐ d. 7 years or above
7. How many years have you been teaching in this particular school?
 - ☐ a. Less than one year
 - ☐ b. 1-3 years
 - ☐ c. 4-6 years
 - ☐ d. 7 years or above
8. Have you received any type of formal multicultural and/or cultural training sensitivity training?
 - ☐ a. yes
 - ☐ b. no

9. If you have received any type of formal multicultural and/or cultural sensitivity training, who provided this training?
- ☐ a. The current administration, which you are employed by
 - ☐ b. A teacher educational program
 - ☐ c. A different school system
 - ☐ d. Other (please describe) _____
10. Have you received training within the school system on how to refer students for special education services?
- ☐ a. yes
 - ☐ b. no
11. Have you received training within your school on how to refer students for potential special education support?
- ☐ a. yes
 - ☐ b. no
12. Have you received training within your school system on the characteristics of students who may need special education services?
- ☐ a. yes
 - ☐ b. no
13. Have you referred one or more Black males for special education services?
- ☐ a. yes
 - ☐ b. no
14. Have any of these referrals resulted in placement into special education services?
- ☐ a. yes
 - ☐ b. no

COMMENTS (Section III)

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey.

APPENDIX C
REQUEST TO SUPERINTENDENT TO CONDUCT
STUDY IN SCHOOL DISTRICT

February 11, 2011

Mr. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] School District
[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]:

As Superintendent of a Coastal school district, I am requesting your permission to use the special education demographic information from a Coastal school district from the 2009-2010 school year. In addition, I will survey teachers from the elementary and secondary levels within the district. The results of my research will be reported in my dissertation, entitled, *The Impact of Teacher Demographics on the Overrepresentation of African American males Special Education in a Coastal School District*.

Any identifying student, teacher, or school information will remain anonymous. Once the dissertation is complete, I will gladly share the findings of my research project with interested individuals. IRB requires that I obtain written permission from the school district's Superintendent prior to beginning my project. Should you wish to grant me permission, feel free to use the attached letter as a template. I appreciate your assistance in this educational venture.

Sincerely,

Myrick Nicks

APPENDIX D

REQUEST TO PRINCIPALS TO SURVEY TEACHERS

February 11, 2011

██████████, Principal
 ██████████ Middle School
 ██████████ School District

Mrs. ██████████,

My name is Myrick Nicks and I am currently enrolled in the doctoral program at The University of Southern Mississippi. I have successfully completed my course work and soon will be conducting the research associated with my dissertation topic. My topic is entitled, *The Impact of Teacher Demographics on the Overrepresentation of African American Males in Special Education a Coastal School District*. The purpose of this quantitative study is to look at teacher demographics and their impact on teacher perceptions of African American males in a coastal school district. I am requesting to use data collected from ██████████ Middle School in my research project.

Upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from The University of Southern Mississippi, I would like to survey the middle school teachers using the Gresham Survey. This survey looks at the causal factors about overrepresentation of African American males.

The survey does not require any student, teacher, or school identify information and therefore all information is anonymous. Once the dissertation is complete, I will gladly share the findings of my research project with interested individuals. IRB requires that I obtain written permission from school district's Superintendent prior to beginning my project. I have been granted permission from your Superintendent, Mr. ██████████ to conduct this research within a Coastal School District. If you are a willing participant for this study, please provide a letter of consent. I have included a template that you may use when developing your consent letter. Should you wish to grant me permission, feel free to use the attached letter as a template and place it on your school's letterhead. I have enclosed a stamped envelope for you to return this letter to me. I appreciate your assistance in this educational venture.

Sincerely,

Myrick Nicks

APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 11120803

PROJECT TITLE: **The Impact of Teacher Demographics and the Overrepresentation of African American Males in a Coastal School District**

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**

RESEARCHER/S: **Myrick Nicks**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & School Counseling**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: **12/13/2011 to 12/12/2012**

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

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